

## **“Characteristics of Commitment,” Part 1 - 1 Corinthians 9:19-21 – June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

- Today's teaching will be part one of a new series I've titled, "Characteristics of Commitment."
- I would venture to say that most if all of you would agree that the Apostle Paul was an outstanding example of being committed.
- Paul is a model of unwavering commitment to Jesus Christ, a commitment to the church of Christ, and winning souls for Christ.
- If you're anything like me, and I suspect you are, you probably want to know how like Paul we can also be so totally committed.
- The example of the Apostle Paul's commitment motivates me to seek out his secret to success in order that I might emulate it.
- However, there's a built in problem with this approach, such that, the characteristics of Paul's commitment come at a high cost.
- Let me explain, while I may wish to possess the characteristics of commitment, I may not wish to pay the cost of commitment.
- Simply put, I have not hope of ever possessing the characteristics of commitment, absent my paying the cost for commitment.
- Enter the text before us in chapter 9, where Paul candidly talks about the cost of giving up freedom for the sake of the gospel.
- I would suggest this is why Paul deemed it necessary to talk about himself, which I don't get the impression he enjoyed doing.
- The reason being is it's easy for us to only see someone like Paul on the surface because they just make it look so effortless.
- To me Paul is like a duck gliding effortlessly on the surface of the water, yet furiously paddling beneath the surface of the water.
- Here's where I'm going with my ducky illustration, we must paddle furiously, to glide effortlessly, on the water of commitment.
- What we're about to see is exactly that, by way of the Apostle Paul, who by way of his example, shows us what it will, cost us.
- Perhaps better said, if we truly desire the characteristics of commitment, we will be willing to pay the cost of that commitment.

### **1. Selflessness (Verses 19-21)**

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

- v19 Paul tells them though he's free and belongs to no one, he made himself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.
- v20 He says to the Jews he's like a Jew to win the Jew and to those under the law, though he's not, he's like them to win them.
- v21 Paul then says to them, he becomes like those not having the law, though he's freely under Christ's law, so as to win them.
- What Paul is saying here is though he was free to do whatever he wanted he would selflessly give that up so as to win souls.
- Clearly, the gospel of Jesus Christ was of paramount importance to Paul, so much so, that he did everything to reach everyone.
- I suppose you could say Paul's selflessness became the catalyst, of sorts, in his commitment to become all things to all people.

As one commentator said it, "Paul was free to do what he wanted, but bringing people to Jesus was more important to him than using his freedom selfishly."

- It's interesting to note that Paul's walk matched his talk, and this on no less than two occasions, the first of which is in Acts 21.
- Namely, he becomes like a Jew to win the Jew by joining in the purification ceremonies, even though he wasn't under the law.
- On another occasion, Paul has Timothy circumcised because he knew he would have no hope of reaching the Jews if he didn't.

Acts 16:1–5 (NIV) — 1 Paul came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived, whose mother was Jewish and a believer but whose father was a Greek. 2 The believers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him. 3 Paul wanted to take him along on the journey, so he circumcised him because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. 4 As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. 5 So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.

- At first read, one could miss the commitment this would require from both Paul and especially Timothy for going through with it.
- He goes through with it because his father was Greek and his mother was a Jew, and as such he would be considered a Jew.
- Not only is Paul committed to reaching the Jews, Timothy is also committed to selflessly have this done when he didn't need to.

One commentator said it this way: "Paul had Timothy circumcised, not for the sake of his salvation (Paul would never do so) but so there would be less to hinder ministry among the Jews."

F.F. Bruce of this wrote, "By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate Jew. If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen to countenance apostasy."

- This brings up the question of why Paul, in Galatians 2, would not allow the Judaizers to circumcise Titus as he had Timothy.
- There are two reasons, first, Titus wasn't a Jew, so for him to do it would have been inconsequential as it relates to the gospel.
- Secondly, circumcision isn't a requirement for salvation and for Titus it wouldn't have required a commitment for evangelization.
- Here's the bottom line in closing, for both Paul and Timothy, selflessness was that which fueled the tank of their commitment.
- Would to God that we are numbered amongst those of whom it is said, "their commitment is evidenced by their selflessness."
- Here's a question we need to ask, is our commitment to Christ more important than selfishly exercising our freedom in Christ?